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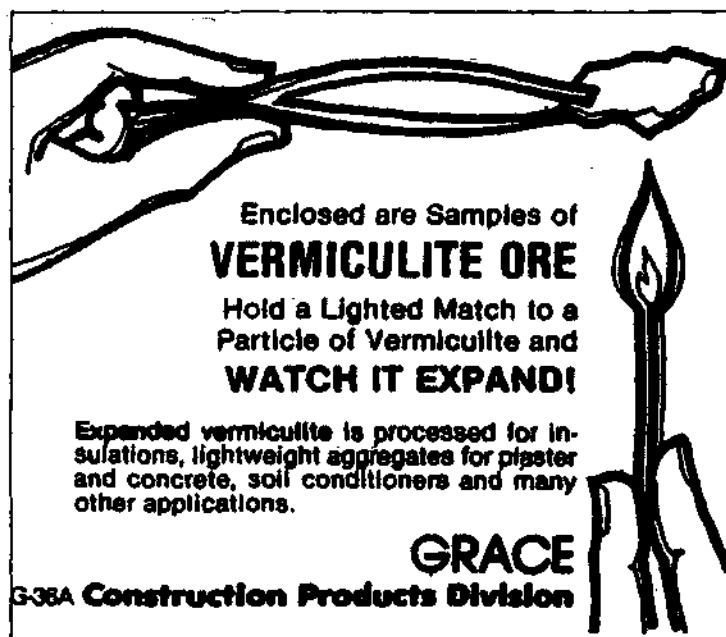
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## To the Editor

### Light shed on Grace's warning about vermiculite safety

To the Editor:

I would like to shed some light in regard to Marchette Momb's questions in the recent letter to the editor you submitted. You asked if W.R. Grace ever told employees not to take vermiculite home for their kids to play with and "pop" on the wood stove for fun. In 1982 the Little League team my son played on won the Montana championship. Each state team was asked to prepare a packet of memorabilia indicative of their area to share with another team at the regional play-offs in San Bernardino. I volunteered to collect items from local businesses for Libby's contribution. The Forest Service gave me bags of Smokey Bear items. The bank donated pens, and the W.R. Grace office on Mineral Ave. gave me packets of vermiculite ore to include. These packets were 3x3-inch zip lock type plastic bags and contained about 75 pieces of ore. The directions showed a hand holding tweezers that in turn held a piece of ore. Another hand was holding a match directly under the ore. The wording on the sample was: Enclosed are Samples of Vermiculite Ore. Hold a Lighted Match to a Particle of Vermiculite and Watch it Expand! Expanded vermiculite is processed for insulation, lightweight aggregates for plaster and concrete, soil conditioners and



many other applications. Grace G-36A Construction Products Division.

I tried this in my home with my children gathered around and it was a fascinating attraction to us. It is my understanding that this procedure could have released microscopic tremolite fibers into the air. It is very upsetting to me that I might have been an unknowing contributor of the tremolite exposure.

The popping of vermiculite was also done as experiments in the local schools. In the last couple of years some of the same type of packets were found and disposed of at the elementary school.

I believe the answer to

your question is a resounding "NO"! I feel W.R. Grace was negligent in preparing packets for distribution to the public when the company had memos in the 60's concerning the potential dangers of the product. They also donated this product for use on local school grounds and other public areas, including the Little League Ball fields adjacent to the packing plant where children played baseball for years. The season started with a parade on Mother's Day down Mineral Avenue which ended at the ball fields where families congregated on bleachers to support their teams that day and continued to do likewise

through a season of sun, rain-storms and blowing dust.

Regarding the child burning his hand on the stove, the fault lies not with the manufacturer of the stove but with the parent who does not provide a barrier to keep the child away or does not watch the child closely enough to keep him from getting burned. If there was a policy about employees at the mine changing clothes and washing before going home, then that policy should have been enforced. The potential reasons for such a policy should have been thoroughly explained to the workers and a document should have been provided for workers to sign so the company would not be held liable for future litigation if health problems arose.

My question is, "Is it up to employees to ensure they don't bring contaminants home to their families or should it be up to the company to provide a safe environment for their employees?"

More information on this subject can be found in documents on web pages such as EPA and ATSDR. The University of Montana web site is also an excellent source. The EPA and ATSDR may make some mistakes but I feel they are working for the best interests of the people of Libby. Whose interests was W.R. Grace protecting?

Carrie Gehrke